



Grand Rapids/Kent County Convention & Visitors Bureau

Testimony in Support of HB 4261

HB 4261 has been jointly requested by the Convention & Visitor Bureaus of Grand Rapids/Kent County and Greater Lansing. Convention and tourism is a vital industry for Michigan which generates \$17.5 billion for our state's economy, creates new jobs and celebrates "Pure Michigan" across the country and around the world.

For my CVB, this bill will enable us to spur more convention and tourism growth in Grand Rapids, Kent County and West Michigan by attracting more regional and national conventions and expanding the reach of our tourism advertising campaigns under the banner of Michigan's West Coast.

Grand Rapids developed a new convention center that opened in 2003. We now have nearly \$100 million in convention business on the books through 2015. These conventions will bring 290,000 delegates to Grand Rapids and to Michigan. Today, we now compete with cities such as: Indianapolis, Columbus, Pittsburgh, and Milwaukee. Cities that have sales and marketing budgets 3 to 5 times greater than ours.

Last summer we worked with outdoor writers from Lansing, Sault Ste. Marie, Detroit and Grand Rapids to book the 2009 Outdoor Writers Association of America convention. We competed head-to-head with Portland, Oregon to bring this 1,000-delegate convention back to Michigan for the first time in 25 years. These delegates will use their time before, during and after the July convention to explore Michigan from the Indiana border to Sleeping Bear Sand Dunes to Mackinaw.

Tourism is also growing in Grand Rapids and West Michigan. Frederick Meijer Gardens now attracts more than 600,000 visitors annually. And as a travel destination, recent research has shown that Michigan's West Coast has regional appeal equivalent to Door County, Wisconsin. We would like to expand this campaign—which currently only runs during six weeks each summer—to include Spring and Fall, as well as to reach out to new markets like Chicago. We intend to do this in partnership with Travel Michigan.

Tourism and convention activity is growing in Grand Rapids and West Michigan. Yet this activity does not just happen. It grows as the result of strategic planning and many organizations, businesses, and individuals working together. HB 4261 enables our community—our local hotel industry specifically—to assess itself to operate a boosted convention and tourism marketing plan. We are now collecting the maximum allowed under current laws. The bill will strategically position Grand Rapids/Kent County to develop more Michigan convention and tourism activity for many years to come.

I request your approval of HB4261. My colleague, Lee Hladki, CEO of the Greater Lansing Convention & Visitors Bureau will now address the importance of this bill for his community.

Steve Wilson, President
Grand Rapids/Kent County Convention & Visitors Bureau